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LIVY THE ORATOR

BY H. V. CANTER
University of Illinois

The body of criticism on Livy's great work, the history of Rome, is enormous, the discussions usually centering around the author's merits or failings as a historian, his matchless style, or his relation to his sources. Only incidentally will any of these points of view be touched upon in this paper, whose purpose is to consider in how far and on what grounds Livy may properly be regarded as an orator.

Alike by the political conditions which obtained in the Roman world during his boyhood years and by training Livy was disposed toward the career of an orator. Fourteen years old at the death of Caesar, he was in early life familiar with scenes of revolution and bloodshed, himself an eyewitness of the last struggles for liberty in the Roman state. A contemporary of Cicero likewise, he saw the state rent by political passions—these ever a fruitful source of eloquence, and he must have felt the influence of that great generation of public orators, the last which Rome was to produce. This influence was fostered by proficiency in philosophy and public speaking, a result always sought as an essential part of the education of a young Roman. Seneca¹ informs us that Livy was the author of a semi-historical, semi-philosophical work written (in early years doubtless) in dialogue form. In the same paragraph Seneca associates him in the matter of eloquence with Cicero and Asinius Pollio. And that Livy as a youth was deeply interested in the art of the orator and the rhetor is not only clear from the style in which his entire history is composed, particularly in the insertion of direct speeches (to be discussed later), but is also confirmed by the testimony of ancient authors who cite criticisms and precepts on rhetoric given by him.² These are important too as reflecting

¹ *Epist.* xvi. 5, 9.

² *Quint.* ii. 5, 20: "tum, quem ad modum Livius praecipit, ut quisque erit Ciceroni simillimus"; viii. 2, 18. See also Sen. *Contr.* ix. 25, 26.

Livy's own style. They show that he was as much opposed to the manner of Sallust, as he was enthusiastic about that of Cicero. Sallust he reproached for the affected and obscure manner assumed in the effort to rival Thucydides. Cicero, on the other hand, he recommended as a model to his son. But above all he admired the great orator's eloquence in the *Philippics*, and this enthusiasm for him is still to be seen in the words with which Cicero is characterized after his death.¹ Livy's ideal, then, was Cicero, the accomplished stylist and past master of eloquence, and this early admiration undoubtedly made familiar to Livy Cicero's views as to the language most suitable to history and oratory.² Notable among these is the advice that the orator should study history to secure the proper flow and variety of diction and that the language and style of the historian should be regular and continuous, flowing with a kind of even smoothness, without the harshness of judicial pleadings and the sting of forensic utterance.³ Further, Livy without doubt adopted these views as a conscious element of style. For he shows as does no other historian the characteristics of the historical style laid down by Cicero as ideal.⁴

Granting then that Livy's earlier training and tastes fitted him peculiarly for the functions of the rhetorician and the orator, we may now observe what opportunity was open to the exercise of these talents, when, about the time of Augustus' accession, he was ready for his lifework. As is well known, men at this period, spent with long civil strife, were eagerly looking for peace. The optimates and the populares, with public liberty now lost, ceased to play any part in public affairs, all political machinery being in the hands of the emperor. But little discussion of political questions was permissible either in the senate or the forum, and anything like Ciceronian oratory was impossible. The restrictions that it had felt even under Julius Caesar now became permanently fixed.

¹ Frag. lib. cxx (cf. Sen *Suas.* vi. 22): "vir magnus, acer, memorabilis fuit, et in cuius laudes persequendas Cicerone laudatore opus fuerit."

² *de Leg.* i. 5: "quippe cum sit opus . . . unum hoc oratorium."

³ *de Orat.* ii. 15: "verborum autem ratio et genus orationis fustum atque tractum et cum lenitate quadam aequabili profluens . . . persequendum est."

⁴ Norden, *Die Antike Kunstprosa*, I, 235.

The meetings of the people became less frequent and less important, while the courts became mere instruments for registering the emperor's will. The whole environment which had fostered public eloquence under the republic changed. The piercing of Cicero's tongue had deeper meaning than the hatred of his personal enemy. It meant that the calling of the orator would henceforth be impossible, and that even men who had won distinction in that field, as Asinius Pollio and Valerius Messalla, must retreat from public life and maintain at least a nominal independence by devoting themselves to literature. In the case of others it meant that with the disappearance of the opportunities and subjects of eloquence they must submit to the new fashion, in which the rhetor supplanted the orator and declaiming superseded speaking. But not to Livy did the new fashion appeal. True to his early inclination, he elected to display his powers of eloquence in a form of activity to which the monarchy permitted freer scope than to oratory; a form in which he was able to combine a genuine affection for the old republic with calm loyalty to the new constitution; a form in which he could with all the eloquence of the orator idealize the simplicity, piety, equity, and majesty of the early Roman state. The voice of public eloquence being stilled under the empire, Livy became a historian in order to remain an orator, an orator who with judgment and good taste put into another form, without altering its essential character, the eloquence which had already appeared in the work of Antony, and Crassus, Cicero, Caesar, and Brutus.

The rhetorical character of Livy's history, often a matter of observation and investigation, will scarcely escape any thoughtful reader. Criticism too, putting aside the misdirected strictures of Niebuhr, Mommsen, and Ihne, with a better understanding of Livy's aims and methods, has dwelt on the fact that his work must be regarded as literature no less than history; that his merits rest rather in the art than in the science of history. And in imparting this rhetorical character to his work Livy is in harmony both with the literary convention of his day and with that general conception of history in antiquity which sought to interest and entertain readers by striking qualities of style. Moreover, just as Roman political institutions had changed, so inevitably had come about

great changes in speech and in literary taste. Prose had already reached such perfection that further development seemed impossible. Apparently only novel treatment could save it from the decline that follows full maturity. Hence writers of the period sought every opportunity to display their artistic skill and to please readers by means that the previous age had not known. In the effort to render language elegant and charming not infrequently facts were neglected or sacrificed for the manner of stating them. The tendency, in keeping with the empty declamation of the day, was toward affectation and artificiality. This tendency, however, Livy opposed in that he employed a pure and transparent language, and further in that he prized the best authors, such as those orators with whose manner of speech he wished not only himself, but others also to be familiar.¹ To preserve the dignity of history he was careful that the spontaneous sparkle and charm which characterize the language of the orator be not spoiled by seeking after point, by empty bombast, and by elaborate concinnity. He refused to employ the excessive ornamentation and extravagance dominant in his day. While clearly striving to lend life to his narrative and to fulfil the demands for chaste ornamentation, he kept within the bounds suggested by natural sense and good taste. His sentence arrangement he changed from the structure of Cicero, but only to carry it to greater refinement than it had shown under the manipulation of the great orator himself. Further, Livy realized how great progress the Latin tongue had made through the work of the poets, and that with change in time a change in the manner and form of speech was necessary. Hence his oratorical prose was enlarged and enriched by the introduction of the poetic element. And that the diction and elegance of the poets appealed to him is clear from the poetic words and phrases in his work not hitherto admitted to prose style.² Vergilian phrases and imagery are there. Twice Homer is mentioned by name,³ and here and there are to be found

¹ Cf. Quint, x. 1, 39: "legendos Demosthenen atque Ciceronem, tum ita, ut quisque esset Demostheni et Ciceroni simillimus."

² For detailed study see Moczyński, *De Titi Livi . . . propria elocutione Quaestiones* (Progr. Deutschkrone 1901-3), Pars I. pp. 6-21; Pars II. pp. 4 f. Stacy, *A L L*, X (1896), 17 f.

³ xxxvii, 19, 7; Frag. lib. xciv.

reminiscences of Homer and Hesiod.¹ So scholars have detected numerous Latin verses, either direct echoes from the poets or perfect enough to have been used in some now unidentified source.

But while it is clear that Livy disapproved of the abuses and excesses of rhetorical usage, he could not have escaped its influence, even had he wished to do so. A passion for the rhetorical is a fundamental characteristic of the Latin speech and literature, founded deep in the nature of the people. Trained in rhetoric and endowed by nature with oratorical and poetic feeling, Livy fashioned, as was but natural, a style designedly artistic, intended to show, just as would an orator, individual situations and phenomena in their most effective light, and to raise them from their individual limitations to ideal importance. Very rarely, moreover, does he relate events so simply that they are merely understood. Usually the narrative is amplified and polished until it pleases. True also to the manner of the orator, his most direct and forceful appeal is to the emotions; he depicts the characters and describes the acts of men, not primarily that they may appear such as they actually are, but that the reader may be moved by admiration and so approve, or by aversion and so disapprove. To conceal, to extenuate, or to adorn the unpleasant reality; to make the worse appear the better reason, or the reverse, according to partisan promptings, these are with Livy, as they have ever been with the orator, a perfectly legitimate procedure.

It follows from the preceding discussion that Livy by training and temperament was in a position to bring before the Roman people its past in a form that corresponded best to their taste and character, and to the demands which they made of their historian. History they considered essentially a branch of rhetoric and oratory,² and Livy's conception of the function of the historian as an oratorical one rests in no small measure on the influence exercised upon him by Cicero. The latter's views about historical composition must therefore be considered in estimating Livy's work. Atticus is represented³ as urging Cicero to undertake history, not,

¹ More than ten such examples are given by Rudolf von Scala, "Griech. Verse bei Livius," *Zeitschr. für Öster. Gym.*, xliii (1892), 108.

² Quint. ii. 18, 5: "historiis quod ipsum opus in parte oratoria merito ponimus."

³ *de Leg.* i. 5.

of course, because he had made any special investigations in that field, but because of his talents as an orator and because his gifts as such made it a duty to the state and to Roman literature. In another instance,¹ after observing that Cato, Fabius Pictor, and Piso were mere narrators of facts and lacking in the art of embellishing their narrative, Cicero says that L. Coelius Antipater raised himself above their level, but complains that even he did not properly diversify his narrative by variety of thought, or give it polish and smoothness, since he was but poorly equipped as an orator. On the other hand, history offers an excellent field for the development and exercise of the powers of eloquence, and Cicero deploras the fact that his countrymen cultivate eloquence merely to display it in pleading causes and in the forum, whereas among the Greeks some of their most eloquent men were wholly unconnected with public pleading. Conspicuous examples are Herodotus who first embellished history, and Thucydides so happy and eloquent in his vigorous expressions that it cannot be decided whether his facts are ornamented by his style or his style by his thoughts. Then Theopompus and Ephorus, who, issuing from the greatest of all the rhetorical schools and following the advice of their teacher Isocrates, devoted their talents to history without ever having practiced public pleading. Thus it is clear that the flowing style of the Isocratean school was Cicero's ideal in history, and that he, as the ancients generally, regarded history as the most artistic of prose forms. To reach this ideal was the task that Livy set before him, and that he attained it in no small measure critics are agreed. It is obvious further from the enthusiastic testimony to his eloquence by the ancients themselves,² who recognized that no one better than he had given expression to the feelings of patriotism, devotion, duty, sorrow, joy, friendship—those tenderer motives of action and conduct which in all ages have loaned the orator words.

Looking more in detail the oratorical element appears most conspicuously in Livy's numerous direct speeches. In them his

¹ *de Orat.* ii. 13.

² Quint. viii. 1, 3: "in T. Livio mirae facundiae viro"; Tac. *Ann.* iv. 34; "T. Livius eloquentiae ac fidei praeclarus in primis"; Sen. *de Ira* i. 20: "quod apud disertissimum virum, T. Livium"; Petrarch, *Rer. Mem.* i. 2: "ab arte eloquentiae non multum abesse."

rhetorical and psychological art is seen at its best, and in them he attained most fully his oratorical purpose. These speeches were valued by the ancients and humanists as the jewels in his history, and Livy doubtless meant them to be the most prominent feature. Their number in the entire work is estimated¹ to have been not fewer than two thousand! In the extant thirty-five books, exclusive of countless indirect speeches, colloquia, and exhortations, there are four hundred and seven.² Rare in the early period, where Livy drew from purely annalistic sources, and where the direct speech would be unsuited to that simple and unadorned age, they become more frequent and more in detail in the time of the tribunes and the struggle between the social orders. And from this time on there is scarcely an important personage from T. Quinctius Capitolinus to L. Aemilius Paulus who is not sketched in one or more speeches. Rarely are they used in a place that is not fitting, or in unimportant situations, while in the more important, they are frequent, particularly where the subject-matter suggests speeches. They are of all kinds; speeches in the senate and before the people, the addresses of ambassadors and the harangues of generals to their armies; speeches adapted to all sorts and conditions of men, Romans, Gauls, Samnites, Greeks, Carthaginians; speeches in the interest of all parties, plebeians, or patricians—in a word speeches which reflect every phase of Roman life, public and private, civil and religious. They rarely if ever offend by excessive observance of rhetorical rules, yet are elaborated withal in such a way as to serve the special purpose and needs of the orator. This aim in their use Livy disguises so little that he leaves his own stamp on every speech, no matter who the speaker. He usually does not strive to imitate the spirit of the time in which the speech is given, or pretend to reproduce the words actually spoken on the occasion and in the exact form given them by the person so represented. This is evident from the various formulae used in introducing them. To have inserted the exact words would not only have broken the unity of his work, but have given far less opportunity for presenting

¹ Soltau, *Neue Jahrb. f. d. Kl. Alt.*, IX (1902), 23.

² Cf. Kohl, *Ueber Zweck und Bedeutung der Livianischen Reden* (Progr. Barmen, 1872), p. 2.

strong rhetorical arguments and emotional appeals, a purpose that the artistic historian never lost sight of in incorporating speeches in his work.

A study of Livy's speeches will show that he employed them in much the same manner an orator would use in presenting like material. Instead of telling in his own words the designs, the actions, and the motives of historical personages, he introduces these as relating their own story, as speaking in set orations. The effect he seeks to make on the reader is that of the orator who stands before him, and in his own voice, with his own lips reveals and pleads his cause. They serve as a vehicle for the elevated and earnest message of the orator. Nowhere else are Livy's deeper feelings so well laid bare; nowhere else does he better give voice to the higher and better motives of human aspiration, and nowhere more than in these overflows of eloquence appear the fulness, dignity, and strength of that speech of which he was such an able master. In them the period is fullest and most artistic. They are not filled with *sententiae* and moralizing admonitions.¹ And that Livy did not lose sight of true proportion in the number of speeches inserted is seen from a comparison with other historians,² particularly with Dionysius, who even in the earliest period lost no opportunity to give long speeches, devoting to them almost a third of his entire narrative. Again, Livy's speeches are not put in merely for the sake of outward ornamentation. They have an additional and more comprehensive aim. They serve the argumentative and explanatory needs of the orator, giving connection to events and deductions from certain courses of action, the inner motives for changes that have arisen, and the purpose and consequences of important movements, political, social, and religious, all these the more frequently the nearer Livy came to his own times and the more he could use the information of his contemporaries. For example, that of Camillus, showing the motives with which he

¹ In this Livy is in keeping with the teachings of rhetoric; cf. *Auct. ad Herenn.* iv. 27, 26: "sententias interponi rare convenit, ut rei actores, non vivendi praeceptores videamur; quom ita interponentur, multum afferent ornamenti."

² See Kohl, pp. 14 f. The figures are: Thucyd. first seven books, 24 per cent; Livy six books of equal length from the third decade, 12 per cent; Sall. *Jug.*, 15 per cent; Cat., 25 per cent; Caes. *B.C.*, 3 per cent; *B.G.*, 1.3 per cent.

persuades the Roman people not to move to Veii,¹ or with which Decius Mus won over the people to the acceptance of the *lex Ogulnia*,² or with which Vibius Virrius in the second Punic War counsels the Campanians to allow themselves and their belongings to suffer annihilation rather than surrender to Rome,³ or the grounds on which Scipio urges and defends his plan for transferring the war against Carthage into Africa.⁴ So in general the discussions about wars, laws, and public institutions, the plans of the magistrates and of the opposing parties in state or senate are unfolded and explained by the speeches. It is especially in important and critical situations that the speeches serve to reveal the motives and aims of the persons speaking. Note that of Marcus Fabius appealing to the senate and the people against the rage and injustice of the dictator against his son Q. Fabius;⁵ that of ambassadors from Capua in the Roman senate, seeking alliance against the Samnites into whose hands their city was about to fall;⁶ that of M. Atilius Regulus counseling mercy toward two Campanian women who had merited well of the Roman state, and punishment for those whose sentiments toward Rome were the same as those of the Carthaginians;⁷ or that of Q. Fabius Maximus to L. Aemilius Paulus, urging vigilance and the *cunctandi ratio* as the proper campaign against Hannibal.⁸ Likewise numerous speeches serve to bring out the party spirit or noble mindedness of the speaker, as that of Q. Fabius pleading for the selection of a consular commander the equal of dread Hannibal, and, in the interest of the public weal, advising against the selection of Octacilius, his own kinsman.⁹

The oratorical element appears further in Livy's moralizing tendencies, in his unscientific interpretations of cause and effect, and his discovery of these often only by accident and while aiming at something else, as well as in his frequent sacrifice of the calm, philosophical reasoning of the historian to oratorical opportunity.¹⁰ Rome's conquests are explained by the cruelty, weakness, and

¹ v. 51-54.⁴ 28, 42.⁷ xxvi. 33, 7.² 10, 7.⁵ viii. 33, 7.⁸ 22, 39.³ 26, 13.⁶ 7, 30.⁹ 24, 8.

¹⁰ Cf. Taine, *Essai sur Tite Live*, p. 135: "On voit comment les raisons des faits sont contenues dans les discours des personnages, comment la science est devenue éloquence, et comment l'historien se trouve philosophe parce qu'il est orateur."

uncivilized habits of the vanquished and the strength and enlightened policy of the conquerors. This antithesis is observable in nearly all the discourses describing the operations and results of the wars, e.g., that of Manlius giving the reasons for the repeated defeats of the Gauls;¹ the tribune Decius contrasting the ignorant and indolent methods of the Samnites with the systematic operations of the Romans;² Hannibal, when recalled by ambassadors from Carthage, gnashing his teeth and reproaching himself for not having marched on Rome from Cannae, bitterly complaining that he had been conquered not by the Roman people but by envy and detraction at the hands of the Carthaginian senate;³ the Athenians entreating the Aetolians also to become Rome's ally against Philip because of his impious and unspeakable cruelties toward the Athenians;⁴ the pitiable impotence of Antiochus,⁵ so confident in the boasting of his courtiers and the gay paraphernalia of his troops, this foolhardy king who passed from Asia into Europe to do battle with the Roman people!

Just so the orator's work is revealed in Livy's drawing of characters which depict qualities that the Romans admired rather than real personages; the valiant and heroic Horatius Cocles who kept the bridge;⁶ the courageous Mucius Scaevola;⁷ Cincinnatus proclaiming death as the just desert of Sp. Maelius disobedient to the dictator, and would-be-king;⁸ Manlius sternly condemning his own son to death for disobedience to consular and paternal authority;⁹ Manlius refusing a ransom to the cowardly survivors of Cannae;¹⁰ Camillus filled with horror and religious indignation at the prospect of abandoning for Veii the city of Rome, every spot of which was associated with the worship of the gods.¹¹ Thus here and in many other places Livy's oratorical purpose prompts him to appeal to Roman sympathies by Roman arguments, to put into relief the most expressive and most admired traits of character and conduct. As a rule he lays bare the simpler, general, human traits, as better adapted to his rhetorical style, in preference to the

¹ 38, 17.⁵ 35, 49; 36, 17.⁹ 8, 17.² 7, 34-36.⁶ 2, 10.¹⁰ 22, 60.³ 30, 20.⁷ 2, 12.¹¹ 5, 52-54.⁴ 31, 30.⁸ 4, 15.

complex and individual, which are better suited to argumentative presentation. But even his portraits that are meant to be individual show the work of the orator. Observe his tone in the description of Hannibal,¹ the purpose of which is less to reveal Hannibal than to excuse the defeats of the Romans by exposing the vices of their great antagonist; his method in that of Scipio, who had virtues so many and excellent that he appeared almost divine,² but whose weaknesses and eccentricities of character are concealed; or that of Cato, the survivor of older Roman virtues, in which eloquence tones down and conceals the ugly, forbidding truths about him which appear in Plutarch, and in Cato's own treatise on agriculture. It is Livy's eloquence that makes him emphasize the great qualities of great men and minimize their weaknesses. The spirit of the orator is everywhere evident in the attempt to arouse emotions rather than to inscribe a character, and in the long gallery of portraits the author appears behind his vague figures, and the portrait of Livy is the most exact and the most complete.³

¹ 21, 4.

² 26, 19.

³ Cf. Taine, p. 248.